

# Understanding and Recognizing Elder Abuse

By

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## Myths & Facts

- ▶ Age 65 is *not* an accurate point to identify old age.
- ▶ Chronological age is *not* a predictor of capability.
- ▶ Aging and disease are *not* one and the same.
- ▶ Age is *not* an appropriate way to identify lifestyles.



## Recognizing Elder Abuse

- ▶ A senior receiving Meals on Wheels shows you his rare coin collection. Approximately a month later he again shows you his coin collection, however, several of the coins are now missing. When you ask the senior what has happened to his coins he tells you that his caretakers had taken the coins for payment for supplies. You return to the meal site and tell the Director – the Director notifies Adult Protective Services (APS).



## Recognizing Elder Abuse

There's an elderly woman whom you have been delivering meals to– who tells you her son recently moved in with her. A week later upon delivering a meal you notice a nasty bruise on her forearm and you ask her about it.



## Recognizing Elder Abuse

Oh, just an accident, she explains; the car door closed on it. She thanks you and upon accepting the meal closes the door quickly. Something isn't quite right about her. You think about the bruise, and her change in behavior at greeting you at the door instead of having you come inside. Well, she has her son now living with her maybe that is why she has chosen to greet you at the door instead of having you come inside.

But there's something else — something isn't right.



## Who Abuses Elders

- ▶ Caregivers (90%)
- ▶ Adult children
- ▶ Other family members
  - Grandchildren;
  - Spouses/partners of elders.



## Where Does Abuse Take Place

Elder abuse tends to take place where the senior lives: most often in the home  
Institutional settings especially long-term care facilities can also be sources of elder abuse.



## Risk Factors

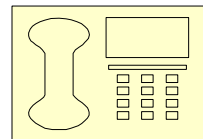
- Shared living arrangement
- Social isolation of victim
- Dementia of victim
- Abuser dependency on the elder
- Mental illness of abuser
- Alcohol abuse by abuser
- Gender of victim (female)

## What is Elder Abuse

- Acts or failures to act by persons required to act
- Results in harm
- Targets an elder / frail / vulnerable adult
- Conduct may or may not be criminal
- Criminal does not include self-neglect

## Some Elders Do Not Report Because

- ▶ Afraid of retaliation.
- ▶ Believe will be placed in an institution.
- ▶ Ashamed that a family member mistreats them.
- ▶ Believe police & social services cannot really help.
- ▶ Feel that no one will believe them.



# Elder Abuse

- ▶ It can happen to anyone
  - Andy Rooney March 2011
- ▶ Victims of financial exploitation are at highest risk for other co-occurring forms of abuse
  - Neglect
    - Self
  - Physical
    - Animal
  - Emotional



## Common Short-Term Victimization Reactions

- ▶ Shock
- ▶ Self blame
- ▶ Disbelief
- ▶ Shame
- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Embarrassment
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Humiliation
- ▶ Frustration
- ▶ Feeling helpless
- ▶ Confusion
- ▶ Grief
- ▶ Perceived lack of security

## Long-term Stress Reactions / “Traumatic Stress Syndrome”

- ▶ Flashbacks (PTSD)
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Sleep / eating disorders
- ▶ Difficulty doing normal activities

## What You Can Say to Elder Victims

- ▶ “I am afraid for your safety.”
- ▶ “It may get worse if something isn’t done.”
- ▶ “I will help you get the assistance you need.”
- ▶ “You don’t deserve to be treated this way.  
You don’t have to take it anymore.”

## Reporting Abuse

- ▶ The first agency to respond to a report of elderly abuse, in most states, is **Adult Protective Services (APS)**.
  - Investigate abuse cases,
  - Intervene,
  - Offer services and advice
- ▶ Every state has at least one toll-free elder abuse hotline or helpline



## Resources

- ▶ National Center on Elder Abuse:  
[www.elderabusecenter.org](http://www.elderabusecenter.org)
- ▶ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services,  
Administration on Aging – Elder Abuse Page:  
[www.aoa.dhhs.gov/elderpage](http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/elderpage)
- ▶ [PEACE Coalition Protecting Elders Against Crime & Exploitation](#)



# Questions

